

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of this application, in light of the following discussion and present amendments, is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-4 are pending in the above-identified application. Claim 1 is amended. Support for the amendment to Claim 1 can be found at page 10, lines 20-23, for example. Claim 4 is newly added. Support for newly added Claim 4 can be found in original Claims 1 and 2 and in Fig. 7, for example. No new matter is added.

Claims 1-3 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as anticipated by Tokunaga (U.S. Patent No. 6,473,996, hereafter "Tokunaga").

At the outset, Applicants note with appreciation the courtesy of a personal interview extended by Examiner Karla Moore to Applicants' representatives. The personal interview was conducted on December 6, 2005, and is substantially summarized below.

Regarding the rejection of Claims 1-3 as anticipated by Tokunaga, that rejection is respectfully traversed by the present response. Amended Claim 1 recites, in part:

a first opening portion which is formed on a part of a wall comprising the chamber to be in communication with the chamber, facing an opening of the clean box so as to allow loading and unloading the wafer between the clean box and the mini-environment portion; and

a door that closes, when the transfer of the wafer is not performed, the first opening portion and opens, when the transfer of the wafer is performed,

wherein when the wafer transferring operation is performed, the clean box is fixed with **a first clearance around the entire perimeter of the clean box** having a predetermined distance between the opening formed plane of the clean box and the outside surface of the part of the wall in which the first opening portion is formed.

(Emphasis added). Accordingly, the first clearance is present around the entire perimeter of the clean box.

In contrast, Tokunaga does not disclose a clearance present around the entire perimeter of the FOUP and located between the FOUP and the chamber. Rather, as shown in Fig. 7, Tokunaga describes protuberances (22) in contact with the FOUP sealing surface (25).

Tokunaga states:

When the FOUP sealing surface 25 of the FOUP shell section 1 is brought into contact with the protuberance 22 provided on the FIMS sealing surface 24, the FOUP system 30 can be held in that position. Consequently, the FOUP sealing surface 25 can be accurately positioned on the FIMS sealing surface 24 by way of the protuberance 22. At least one protuberance 22 is provided, and three to four or more protuberances 22 are usually provided on the FIMS sealing surface 24.¹

Accordingly, the FOUP sealing surface (25) is in contact with protuberances (22) on the FIMS sealing surface (24). Therefore, as discussed in the personal interview, Tokunaga fails to disclose a clearance around the entire perimeter of the clean box as recited in amended Claim 1. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that amended Claim 1 and Claims 2 and 3, depending directly or indirectly from amended Claim 1, patentably distinguish over Tokunaga for at least the reasons discussed above.

Newly added independent Claim 4 recites, in part:

A wafer processing apparatus including a mini-environment portion having a chamber therein and configured to transfer a wafer between a clean box having a lid and housing the wafer and the chamber, said apparatus comprising:

a first opening portion which is formed on a part of a wall comprising the chamber to be in communication with the chamber, facing an opening of the clean box so as to allow loading and unloading the wafer between the clean box and the mini-environment portion; and

a door that closes, when the transfer of the wafer is not performed, the first opening portion and opens, when the transfer of the wafer is performed,

wherein when the wafer transferring operation is performed, the clean box is fixed with a clearance having a

¹ Tokunaga col. 7, lines 35-43.

predetermined distance between the opening formed plane of the clean box and the outside surface of the part of the wall in which the first opening portion is formed; and

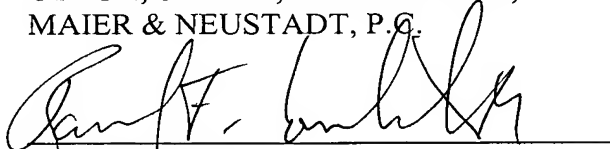
wherein when the door is positioned to substantially close the first opening portion, a second clearance in the door through which the chamber and the exterior of the mini-environment portion are in communication with each other exists.

Accordingly, in addition to the clearance, the apparatus has a second clearance provided in the door through which the chamber and the exterior of the mini-environment portion are in communication. Newly added Claim 4 recites the substantially the same features as Claims 1 and 2 before the present amendment to Claim 1. As discussed in the personal interview, Tokunaga does not disclose providing any second clearance in the door through which the chamber and the exterior of the mini-environment portion are in communication. Rather, Tokunaga describes a substantially solid door (14) without any clearance therein. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that newly added Claim 4 patentably distinguishes over the cited reference for at least the reasons discussed above.

Consequently, in light of the above discussion and in view of the present amendment, the present application is believed to be in condition for allowance and an early and favorable action to that effect is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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